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THE

# CURSE OF CONVENTIONALISM:

A REMONSTRANCE.

BY

A PRIEST OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND.



LONDON :

WATTS & CO., 17, JOHNSON'S COURT, FLEET STREET.

*Second Edition.—Price Twopence.*



MC: 4169916

## THE CURSE OF CONVENTIONALISM.

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MY BROTHERS,

In committing the following ideas to paper, I do not pretend to anything new, but seek only to reveal some of my graver thoughts, and some misgivings which trouble me, and which will not fail to bespeak your attention and sympathy. Perhaps I am more shocked than shaken ; but the longer I live, and the more I think and learn (and maybe I differ somewhat from many of my brethren in trying to learn more than I try to teach), the more concerned am I that we are getting behind the time—that we do not recognise more clearly the paramount importance of reconciling dogma with discovery, our aspirations with new truths, and, above all, our practice with our principle. I am pained that we are slow to allow that, as finite beings, with finite conceptions, our ideas about the Infinite must ever be imperfect, indefinite, and at the same time progressive ; that fashion of thought must change, like all other fashion, though not causelessly or suddenly, but by natural transitions, which startle only those who fail to watch their constant progress. “The Great Problem,” though all unchanged, will doubtless present ever-varying aspects, as time casts new lights and shades—something like the summer cloud, which, against the background of infinity, seems, from our finite standpoint, ever changing, though (for all its vague suggestive forms) it is ever the same. And there is also a shifting cloud that always more or less obscures the spiritual atmosphere which takes a forbidding form to-day. It is not, perhaps, without its silver lining ; but I wish to draw some of its darker shadows, as they present themselves to me.

What are the most ominous signs affecting ourselves that I, as a clergyman, note?—

That our flocks have grown thinner.

That our hold upon them is less and ever lessening.

That the old faith is being boldly challenged.

And the causes seem to be :—

That the world has progressed, while we have not.

That, being out of date, we are also out of touch.

That neither what we practise, nor even what we preach, bears any true resemblance to what Christ taught.

I propose, then, to try and show the reality of these causes, and to trace them to a rigid conventionalism, which, in the past, has never failed to put us in the wrong, which we still perpetuate, and which to-day places us in a position which I, for one, can no longer endure.

While old ideas are being up-rooted every day, men's consciences and reason alike must clamour to be satisfied that our stereotyped teaching is not out of harmony with ascertained fact. But we heed not, and are content to maintain that the strict letter of Scripture as hitherto interpreted must forever stand unaltered, however profoundly the mental and moral cultus of the human race may change. And yet it is absolutely certain that it will be impossible for the rising generation to accept many interpretations that passed current in the olden days, or even many that were still popular when we were in our nurseries ; interpretations palpably untrue, yet perpetuated just like the errors in old-fashioned class-books which are so fondly reproduced in each fresh edition ; notions formed when men regarded our tiny earth (which is among the globes in space only as one grain of sand on the sea-shore) as the centre and limit of the habitable universe, and all the host of Heaven made for it alone ; when all facts and phenomena then unexplained were naturally held to be specially providential or miraculous, and when men's conceptions were so crude and cramped, and they withal so blindly ignorant, that they arrogated to themselves the right to dogmatise freely, out of a book of which they understood little, about matters of which they understood nothing.

Then shame on us if the ever-widening revelation of God's universe and the perfection of His laws has failed to teach us greater modesty and higher reverence than our forefathers possessed, and that many of their conceptions are, in the light of our day, untenable, if not profane. God help us if, moreover, we do not recognise that the teaching that was adapted to the ignorance and inexperience of child-man must apply differently to ourselves to-day—that the interpretation of the letter must need some modification, though the spirit be as true as ever. To attempt to hide this would not only be to attempt the impossible, but also to shirk a solemn duty which we owe to all inquiring minds ; and, if our system requires this of its followers, or that they abandon their freedom of thought, then that system is undermined already. For mark the inevitable consequence of our present narrow teaching. Our children are, from earliest years, made to understand that the truth of

the creed that is taught them hangs upon the literal exactness of Scripture history and our traditional rendering thereof. This is almost universal, and any teacher who would venture on any reservation, or word of caution, would scarcely be tolerated. But it is not very long before young minds begin to yearn for freedom, nor will it be very long before they are liable to receive the rudest shock. They will presently hear how, in the very first page of Scripture, the received text has to be most severely handled, and the "day" has to do duty for an "epoch," notwithstanding the troublesome "morning and evening." Then (taking it all literally) comes the impossible sequence of events; and, lastly, the "resting from His work" ("*in dignified repose*" we are told by way of explanation), in face of what the Heavens are telling us every hour! Then they may hear how impartial critics find another distinct as well as contradictory account in the very next chapter, and even a far older Chaldean mythology on which the Biblical record would seem founded. But there is no need to particularise, since the first pages will teem with difficulties to the unprepared mind, even before it comes to face the formidable array of verbal contradictions that follow, and those arithmetical untruths where two and two have to be stretched to make five, if not five thousand.

And why all this sad blunder on our part? Why do we fall back on that marvellous special pleading, which a Ballantine might envy, in order to hold our position? Few things distress me more. Beyond measure I wonder at the elasticity that divines discover in their text, and the surpassing ingenuity with which they can make white read like black; but most profoundly do I distrust both. And, in Heaven's name, why are we still in this false position? Why are we yet constrained to induce our little ones to believe, for example, that Joshua for a positive fact caused the sun to stand still? (What, by the way, does that mean, since with respect to us it never moves?) Or that Noah verily took the entire fauna of our earth—from hot countries and cold, from the elephant to the microbe—into his ark, and fed them all; and, since the fiat was that "everything that is in the earth shall die," that our mighty globe, which literally teems again with life in every smallest cranny—in Polar solitudes and ocean depths—has been overspread from that one centre, somewhere in Armenia, in this (geologically speaking) infinitely short space of time? Our children will know that geologists can read the record of the rocks as surely as any history, while astronomers can trace every perturbation of our system; and must *we* then require their acceptance of these supreme catastrophes, of which no trace exists? All these are questions—and there are very many like them—to which our answer is imperatively demanded. And what questions more solemn? "Shall I speak lies in

the name of the Lord?" We are taunted with being "literal, but illiterate;" and is not this true? And in consequence are we not doing untold mischief to our high cause? Is it not we, and not the Book, that has been in error? And would not this error be avoided if only we were a little more modest and humble-minded, a little less bigoted and dogmatic?

The grand mistake has been that we have always been too satisfied that our knowledge is sufficient and our assumptions unassailable. I have been told: "We know what we have to preach; we are not concerned with science." But are you quite sure? The Book of Nature lies open before you, and it is God's Book; and if in 1,000 instances—affording the saddest blots in history—the teachers of religion, through a wilful ignorance or jealous hatred of that book, have committed inconceivable wrongs, of which the murder of Hypatia, the torture of Galileo, the burning of Bruno, are but types and samples; and if, in the same spirit, you only anathematise the Galileos of our own generation to-day, then I ask again, Are you really quite sure you know what you have to preach, and that you really have no concern with science? But, again, on the *tu quoque* principle, I was told that teachers of science on their part were also too assuming, and that we should never know what to believe, since they only build up theories for others to knock down again. This is a very common retort of theologians, and a natural consequence of their own ignorance; but the accusation is most unjust. There have doubtless been quacks in science, with whom we are not concerned; and it is also true that, until honest inquirers shook themselves free from theological thralldom, there were many who tried to reconcile new facts with old dogmas, and failed signally; but, if you look at the unbiassed pioneers of science, you will not find among them any contradictions to shake our faith in the laws they have established, and which have tended consistently in the same direction. Moreover, you may learn a very wholesome and significant lesson from the striking difference between the calm, cautious spirit of our leading scientists and the theologians' "unerring intrepidity of ignorance." It is true enough that fresh theories are being constantly advanced—they are the only stepping-stones to knowledge—but it is with the full assurance that they will go straight into the relentless crucible of modern scrutiny, and must stand or fall entirely on their own merits.

But there has been no such test to act as a check upon the crude speculations of fanatics and the arrogant assumptions of enthusiasts, and thus upon the simple story that was left them has come a fungoid growth of myth and mystery, springing from very hot-beds of casuistry and superstition. And it is in consequence of this, and of that confessed ignorance of the typical theologian already referred to—his

opinionativeness and self-complacency—that his system (as I ventured to assert) no longer bears any true resemblance to that which Christ taught.

This is a startling assertion to make ; but it does not come from a few, or from outsiders only ; it is tacitly acknowledged by numbers among your flocks, and is preached boldly from not a few of your own most eloquent pulpits—that, whereas Christ's teaching was essentially a life to be lived, our conventional system, on the other hand, is rather a theory to be believed, a form to be observed, a very stagnation of dogma, which, "however much hatred it is capable of inspiring, is quite incapable of exciting any love."

Judge the tree by its fruits. Look at our worship, our services. How much of sham is in them ! How perfunctory and mechanical ! Monotonous enough even without the monotone. I think, if we would only confess, there is throughout scarcely any worship worthy to be so called, unless God is pleased to accept a certain propriety of behaviour—a demure expression and exemplary patience through a tedious hour and a half. The modern *Amen*, no longer compounded for with the clerk, but beautifully chanted in musical cadence, carries no better guarantee than of yore that it really comes from the heart. The question has very often vexed my soul, whether, when that well-rehearsed service is over, there has been anything really of the nature of prayer. The words of Isaiah ring in my ears : "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices?" "Incense is an abomination unto me." "Your new moons and sabbaths (your conventional church-going) I cannot away with." "Their fear toward me is taught by the precept of man ; therefore, behold the wisdom of their wise men shall perish." And the words of one greater than Isaiah : "In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." Or of one later, who warns us against the man who would beguile us by a false form of religion vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind.

Such words must have searched home long ago but for the indolence, the self-interest, and self-complacency of the great mass of our clergy, of the result of whose influence, past and present, I fear we are apt to form a one-sided notion, partly from an unavoidable bias, partly from refusing to look fairly at the darker side of Church history. We all shudder at the scandals of the Middle Ages, when among bishops and their clergy, in addition to all else that was revolting, there prevailed "a general moral obtuseness of feeling relative to the guilt of practising deception and telling lies ;" and it is saddening to all of us to reflect that those were the days when their influence was greatest, and such the circumstances under which acts of so-called piety abounded, and your churches and revenues were to a large extent raised. But do

we recognise that in all ages ecclesiasticism has also been the greatest clog to progress, and is so still? Her attitude with regard to every fresh discovery has really altered not one jot from what it was in the days of Galileo and Bruno, though she has had to learn a lesson of humility over every one of those many main questions where she has ventured to join issue with science. These melancholy records fill a thick and profoundly instructive volume, which I would earnestly commend to bishops as a fitting subject for ordination examination. I can only glance rapidly at a few as samples.

Remember how, in the past, Theology had literally fought to the death (of her victims) for her dogmatic assertion as to the world's position in the universe, and how utterly she had been worsted. Is it conceivable, then, that only lately she could rush headlong into like discomfiture over the earth's age? Yet she did; and her veriest curses were vented on those who would deny that the world was only 6,000 years old, and that God had made it in six days. She might have foreseen her confusion from the labours of Cassini and Newton alone, even before geology had entered the lists against her; but, alas! "she had no concern" with such knowledge, and so it has come about that those who were told from the pulpit so positively, as an essential of their very creed, that the world was only a few thousand years old have now to consider whether it may not be hundreds of millions. But, ever and anon, Science, escaping from false dogma, has not only marshalled her facts—she has been able, under God, to see laws behind them; and it is scarcely too much to say that each of these, in turn, has been combatted by ecclesiastics. The laws of Kepler, Copernicus, Newton, were too outrageously wicked, and needed to be set down, forsooth, by the authority of the Church! So, again, when the investigations of Herschel and Laplace found expression in the nebular hypothesis, a pious cry was raised that these men were "shutting out God from His works." And the same childish lament has been heard all along in the theological nursery. It was well nigh despairing a few years ago over pre-Adamite man; but by that time the caves and rocks were giving up their dead, and it had to hush itself asleep. But not for long. When time was ripe, and the greatest genius of our age made known his immortal evidences of Evolution, the outcry was raised again; at first wrathfully, presently more piteously, as the new truth became a foregone conclusion.

When argument is lacking, it is a common practice to substitute vehemence of language. The Church party has always adopted this expedient. They have anathematised Newton for his rainbow, Franklin for his kite, the followers of Fraunhofer for the spectroscope. When the test of torture was denied them, they still sought other means to

wreak their narrow-minded vengeance on all whom they could reach. It was the clergy who petitioned the Board of Longitude to exclude Priestley (!) from their scientific expedition. It was the clergy who tried to extinguish the Royal Society. It was they who opposed Fire Insurance as "tempting Providence," and Life Insurance as "interfering with the consequences of God's will." It was they who most vehemently exclaimed against vaccination, and forbade the alleviation of pain by anæsthetics. It was the clergy who, in very recent years, positively drew up a memorial to prevent researches in science endangering their interpretation of Scripture. What else was to be done? Science had been so remorseless. It had exploded a cherished mystery by a simple calculation. It had cast discredit on ancient prophecy by a sum in algebra. Even the signs in earth and heaven, the visible tokens of God's wrath—even these had been banished by an appeal to nature. Truly nature must be accursed. It must be a consequence of the Fall. The Canon, the Councils, the Prayer Book, the Pope, not one nor all had been able to prevail against her. And why? Mainly because ecclesiastics had failed to see that a quotation from Scripture is not an argument. It is impossible to stop the earth's rotation by a text. Yet that was exactly what they had tried to do. A popular preacher of our Church writes thus of the teachers of Christianity, that they have "numbed and narrowed the intellect, dragged the name of Christ through the mire of ignorance and bigotry and cruelty, grovelled in the most degrading superstition, opposed sanitary reform, taken an inadequate view of family life, and been for ages completely insensible to political freedom."

And have they changed? Again I say, not one jot. The rack and the stake are gone, but the same jealous hatred remains. The cry of "Sorcerer" has become obsolete; but that of "Infidel" is the modern equivalent. The same denunciations which the sainted fathers hurled against the discoverers of the earth's shape and motion have been used in our own day against a Lyell, a Herschel, a Sedgwick. And what has been the result? On the theological side, ridicule and shame; on that of science, conquest everywhere and the constant advance of truth—but under what a clog!

Look at it fairly, and judge between Conventional Religion and Science, which has chiefly ameliorated the condition of mankind. Science has won every triumph of civilisation, where teachers of religion would have kept us in mediæval barbarism. "Let us keep to the old paths" has been their cry, which, among other things, would entail the old penalties, the superstitions and the scourges, witchcraft and the small-pox.

Have we, professors of Truth, been all along the perpetrators of

Error? It is so. Then, looking at the present hour, it goes without saying that there would be not only far fewer mischievous blunders, but also much less of that self-satisfaction and bigotry among the clergy, if as a body they only made the least effort after knowledge; but we know how the case stands. The large majority are, of course, Poll or Passmen—*i.e.*, they have obtained the certificate for the minimum amount of a certain learning (?), which is of an essentially mediocre and unabiding character. And yet all study ends almost immediately thereafter! This is a downright disgrace; and so also is the universal excuse, "Oh! we haven't the time for reading!" For those men as a rule read enormously. If you were to compile in book-form the columns of the daily and weekly press they so voraciously devour, you would be astonished at the amount of reading that is got through, and very creditably digested; but how valueless—rather, how simply shameful—if it constitutes (as it does) the backbone of the *teacher's* study! The trumped-up articles and frothy speeches of the hour, which commonly possess no merit beyond their studied misrepresentation and bitter party bias; the gossip and tittle-tattle, spiced with the demoralising details of the law courts; or (if it be a Church paper) those correspondence columns, with their most unhappy and unchristian bickerings—all of it estimated at its true value the next morning, when it is used to light the fire! Oh no! you cannot, I am sure, find time or appetite for any more solid reading after such a surfeit. But by Saturday night the parson's weekly literary task has had to be faced. He has had to write or copy out his *sermon*, or, more probably, to hunt up an old one. I fear we *must* look at one, and so will choose a fair average sample. Well, will it bear comparison with a school-boy's essay? In these days of superabundant literature that curious relic of the past is a pure anachronism; and, if it still has any power at all, it is actually repellent. This is a shameful fact, of which, however, few any longer make a secret. And yet I have had abundant proof from secular (?) lectures that it is comparatively easy to command entire attention by discoursing on those modern truths (no less Divine) which are carefully excluded from our pulpits by the narrow conventionalism of so-called orthodoxy. I am verily certain that it is that very narrowness, and the bigoted insisting on many points now avowedly doubtful, that condemns the modern sermon. Inquiring minds are puzzled, the better-informed insulted, the majority scarcely even listen, and all alike are utterly bored. It makes matters worse, too, that the style affected is commonly so artificially stilted, sing-song, or full of mannerisms, as though unwilling ears were more likely to be tickled by a fashion of delivery alike unnatural and absurd. Surely the language of the preacher's message should burn with unaffected eloquence, if it be only

genuine ; but, then, is he always himself fully persuaded by that tedious tirade ? I am not sure.\*

I must pass on to look at the clergy in themselves. I shall refrain from comment on the effect that a position of assured security and easy self-satisfaction may have had upon their bearing and moral conduct. Every little neighbourhood will tell its own tale, and, if it can be shown that, as a class, compared with other educated gentry, they set that higher example that must be expected of them, I shall be glad indeed. But the world at least hears testimony to some shortcomings. If the clerics no longer hold quite the same position in society, this may be partly, but not entirely, because the flattened wide-awake is now not always worn by a thorough gentleman. They have only to thank themselves if their office now ranks only as a doubtful qualification among their equals, and if among a large and rapidly-increasing class they are well nigh scouted. They have to thank themselves if they have to bear a large share of the resentment felt by struggling thousands towards those who enjoy a competency full cheaply earned. When times are easy human nature never fails to take advantage, and even the Church, which has been now so long under State protection, and "lifting high its mitred front in king's palaces," has not been exempt from this universal law. The much-needed reform is being loudly clamoured for. In every little neighbourhood people are asking, What right of patronage has a right to appoint a man like that ? Why can't he be got rid of ? How is he able to set his Bishop at defiance ? Why is it well nigh impossible to establish against him even a clear case of misdemeanour ? Or, again, how can another get himself preferment by an act of very simony under the subterfuge of a mere legal quibble ? Or how can a third remain in office when he is no longer a believer in essential doctrines ? Let me put that last question again in a modified form. How are we to interpret the fact that numbers in the ministry are still holding office—even the highest—while apparently no longer unhesitatingly adhering to the entirety of their old creed ? As to the fact itself, let current literature answer, or the Church Congress, or the story of the three Bishops who, before a recent meeting of the British Association, are reported to have, as by common consent, so frankly and freely yielded important ground within view of that assembly that even

\* I confess it did rather startle me lately, at the popular church of a fashionable seaside place, to see numbers of those who had put in the customary attendance at the 11 a.m. service *trooping out before the sermon* ; but I reflected that, being strangers to the clergyman, they must probably be somewhat indifferent to his feelings ; and perhaps one could fairly judge of what hold any service had on the more reflective and practical portion of a representative concourse like that by the fact that at the early communion there were fully seven women to one man !

Huxley could not help declaring in astonishment that "they had conceded all *he* asked." But it is hard to believe that orthodoxy, at its best, bears any true resemblance to what Jesus taught, whether that word does duty for theology or (what is quite distinct) religion—for theory or practice. That it fails as a theory ought to be sufficiently evident from the fact that it admits of such widely different developments; that as a "working hypothesis" it may, as it often has, even led to monstrous wrong. Neither can orthodox or any conventional Christianity be really *Christian* while it degenerates into a religion so utterly *selfish*—the doing right for reward and the ultimate benefit of self, rather than for right's sake and regard for others; in pursuing which end its followers seem to me to differ little essentially save in longer-sightedness or temperament from the followers of mere present pleasure. "But ye have not so learned Christ," the which St. Paul explains would mean a large-hearted charity. And has there been a vestige of this? Let all the host of Christian (?) sects make answer, each of which arrives at only one point of general consent—viz., that all the rest lead men astray, and yet, though Heaven itself might hang upon the choice, it would be desperately hard to choose between them all, were it not that the son naturally follows the father, almost as a matter of course.

Then does not Christianity differ by the whole Heaven from the Gospel of Love, in that it has become, of many sad religions, the very saddest of all? Go into the churchyard of any place where you have lived for twenty years, and, assuming the conventional Heaven and Hell, with their relative proportions, look around and say honestly if the God of the typical teacher be any less fiendish than his Devil! This blasphemous perversion of Christ's life and message was doubtless adapted to serve a purpose, and it has often served it well. Let those who point so proudly to the noble ecclesiastical buildings and endowments of a past age as proof of Christian love and zeal, ask themselves at the same time how much was also due to the lamentable superstition of an intensely ignorant age, worked upon by a corrupt and designing priestcraft.

But the nightmares of the past seem vanishing, the old texts notwithstanding. Ghosts are no longer popular. Our judges no longer, with Scripture on their lips, burn witches alive; and lo! a doughty Canon steps to the front and threatens to extinguish the very fires of Hell.

I have now glanced in a general way at ourselves and our system, our professions and our practice; and if, after twenty years of clerical life, I retire, at least for a while, from active participation in our ministry, it is from a deep conviction that it no longer bears any true

resemblance to the Great Pattern, and this, as I have tried to show, in consequence of that other count with which I started : that we have dropped behind when God required progress. As Professor Momerie shows, in a series of trenchant sermons : "Christ, as plainly as words can do it, has declared progress to be an essential element in His system.....If anyone suppose that inspiration makes a difference and renders progress impossible, I reply that it does make a difference ; but that it renders progress imperative." How many more are not saying the like words at this hour ? And if I, too, after much patience and searching of conscience, find myself in a false position, you must not misjudge me. My life and voluntary work among you, and those around you, for twelve years past, shall speak for me. In a true faith and admiration for the faultless life I will yield to none of you, only I will allow no cant to dwarf my reason and imagination, which I aver carries me to a far higher and nobler conception of God than that which contents yourselves ; nor will I allow—for all you assert to the contrary—that conviction is subject to will, or that, by any effort or attitude of mind, I can honestly admit anything the truth of which I doubt. Nor would I make the attempt. I read of Heaven that "whatsoever maketh a lie shall in no wise enter therein ;" and lies enough already, God knows, have been made by unreasoning obedience to your unyielding authority. This it is which, through a long, sad history, has laid us under a very curse—the curse of a narrow conventionalism. If that history has a brighter side—as, thank God, it has—it only throws into darker shade that curse that has never left it, and which is, indeed, incredible and inconceivable, until you read it all impartially and patiently (*i.e.*, as patiently as you can), and see what bitter hatreds, cruelties, butcheries, scourges, degradation, and foulness of all kinds have followed in the train of that superstition which conventional theology has fostered, and which has only yielded to the increased knowledge of God's laws in nature which theologians have so persistently opposed. Am I bidden to believe that their teaching is really Christ's, and that Christ's example has been transmitted in any true likeness in a system that, through long, dark ages, was built up to so great an extent of human dogma and delusion, and developed so much of man's selfishness and prejudice ? God forbid ! Was the saintly Tertullian a Christian when he (and others after like manner) wrote of their self-fashioned Hell : "How I shall admire, how laugh, how rejoice, how exult, when I behold so many groaning in the lowest abyss of darkness.....so many sage philosophers blushing in the red-hot flames," etc. ? Or were those Christians who, gloating over the agonies of God's martyrs (in science), answered them only by the sign to the executioner, "Give the screw another wrench" ? Or are those

Christians to-day who, with bitter prejudice, if not hatred, revile and scorn the names of each fresh self-denying searcher after truth? Such questions make one burn with shame, and it only adds to one's humiliation to see the way in which theologians shirk and fence with their worst difficulties, or slur them over, or quibble about them, or else pooh-pooh them with a pious contempt as being "only the old objections raked up again." And so, in truth, they are; and that very fact is the strongest proof that they have never yet been answered. Are we content to leave matters thus? Do not objections rather wear a special significance just now, when science is demanding of us greater evidence of our creed, and advanced criticism is throwing doubt on the little that we have?

I should exceed all bounds were I to enumerate the half of those questions that are claiming our immediate attention and most careful answer. Neither is this the place in which to discuss them; but I cannot pass over our general attitude and answers with respect to them.

When researches in mythology and astrology have placed some Old Testament puzzles in a new light, which threatens to explain them away altogether by claiming to show that the Egyptian marvels, the Hebrew rites and festivals, the labours of Samson, the destroying angel, etc., each in turn, by a wonderful harmony, are but mere parallels of other fanciful folk-lore; when the study of comparative religions produces foreign originals of which the Judaic records *seem* but imperfect copies, and even the story of the Virgin Mother is forestalled by many centuries; when "higher criticism" has sifted Scripture throughout and finds a collection of authors in place of Moses, or rejects whole books as not genuine; when, again, under such scrutiny, historical silence, both Scriptural and secular, assumes a new significance; when crucial questions of all kinds confront us now with tenfold force—we cannot afford any longer to be careless how we answer. In justice, I must acknowledge that the gravity of the situation is already being honestly acknowledged by *some* in high places, as when an archbishop points to a "human element" in Scripture to account for difficulties which cannot be explained, or chosen speakers, clerical and episcopal, of the Church Congress allow that "it has become impossible to regard the Bible as verbally inspired;" "it is not protected from historic and other errors;" "it betrays both human fallibility and human bias;" "that the two records of creation in Genesis do not admit of reconciliation either with the discoveries of science or with one another," etc., etc.

But what of our *general* attitude? Is a desperate attempt at reconciliation so imperative that it should be made at any risk to truth? Is

it wise that our teachers of religion should try to cover a bad position by reckless statements on points of which, as a body, they are profoundly ignorant? Can it be well, for instance, that they should go about with the ready falsehood that "Darwinism has broken down," when it was never more firmly established? Or the old platitude, that "all men, savages included, naturally believe in a future life," when recent authorities tell us, on the contrary, "that whole nations, constituting from first to last the immense majority of the human race, have had none of these ideas"? Ignorance will not excuse the perversion of fact; nor, I fear, will it be the classical works on theology that will supply what is lacking in our knowledge. Not one of them, as required by our Bishops, will throw light on one of the scientific difficulties, though they may dogmatise freely about them. I was looking lately in an accepted authority on our creed for some argument that might afford a loophole for escape from the painful "no death before the fall" dilemma. I did not find it, but became involved instead in many weary pages requiring, with fulsome exactness, our unequivocal belief that our bodies will rise again with all their former actual, individual, material particles! Oh! how has it come about that, without rhyme or reason, a man should deliberately put himself in such a corner, and what mad infatuation makes so many to-day—who should know better—rush like a flock of sheep into the same corner with him? If you tell them about pre-Adamite man, or of how the material constituents of our bodies already have entered, and again will enter, into numberless other bodies, they only reply: "That makes no difference."

But I am well nigh out of patience. As matters stand, I see I am not properly one of you, and will not pretend to be. I will admit no compromise, for I must be wholly loyal or withdraw. I cannot, from any narrow and antiquated sentimentalism, brook to stand in a false position—a position not only intensely humiliating, but fast becoming ridiculous. I cannot allow myself to be fettered by any rigid formalism which stands in the place of the imitation of Christ. Nor will I open my mouth again, if I can help it, to perpetuate, by one ill-chosen word that could be avoided, any ideas of things Divine which are alike unworthy and untrue. I have been called upon, week by week, to declare in uncompromising language that "in six days the Lord made heaven and earth." Well, He did not. If those words do not mean that, but something else, then I would sooner give up using those words.

I have written enough. I have tried to write fairly as well as freely; and, however ill arranged these ideas may seem, they are at any rate the outpouring of a mind that has long been very full, and one which is

now fully made up. For the present at least, I repeat, I must stand out. And if only my doing so be properly understood, I shall not regret the wrench.

I fear I began with mild remonstrance, and end with strong invective. I cannot help it. That ominous cloud that I have been looking at has gathered blackness. I have the surest faith that it yet will break again, but not, I fear, without the storm. If ever I saw a threatening thunder pack, I see one now. I cannot describe its shape ; I cannot give it a fitting name ; but, in place of a better, have called it the CURSE OF CONVENTIONALISM.

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